

*A. E. Green.*  
**GOWANUS IMPROVEMENT**  
TRIBOROUGH BRIDGE AUTHORITY



Nov 1944

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# GOWANUS IMPROVEMENT



NOVEMBER 1, 1941

TRIBOROUGH BRIDGE AUTHORITY

# GOWANUS IMPROVEMENT

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The Gowanus Improvement, like most major surface and elevated traffic improvements in the metropolis, has had a checkered history. For many years, city and state park officials, and other authorities and agencies wrangled over the Belt System and its tributaries. The permutations and combinations by which the greater part of this system was actually built have been explained before and need no elaboration here.

As more and more of the system was opened, anyone with half an eye could see that the big gap was between Owl's Head in Brooklyn and the Battery in Manhattan. It was conceded that an elevated parkway restricted to passenger vehicles was required from Owl's Head to a bridge or tunnel leading to Manhattan, that Third and Hamilton Avenues were the streets to follow, and that widening of these streets was essential to serve the South Brooklyn waterfront which today is one of the busiest defense areas in the country.

At first blush, a tunnel from Hamilton Avenue by way of Governor's Island to the Battery was found to be inordinately expensive, financially unstable, and slow to build. The Triborough Bridge Authority and the City Park Department then jointly suggested a bridge which could have been constructed in half the time, at half the cost, with twice the capacity, and one-third maintenance. Local opposition to the bridge based largely on esthetic arguments found its way to Washington where, in spite of the removal of all objections on the score of navigation, the Secretary of War denied a permit on the grounds that such a bridge would be seaward of the Navy Yard and would somehow constitute a war menace.

The Mayor and his advisers then turned back to the tunnel proposal, and finally a financial scheme was devised by which the New York City Tunnel Authority borrows some \$57,000,000 from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, the City pays for land and construction at both plazas, for Manhattan approaches and for a new low-level lift bridge over the Gowanus Canal, and the Triborough Bridge Authority pays \$15,000,000 for land and construction for the Gowanus Parkway and surface improvements in Brooklyn from Owl's Head to Hicks Street. Consolidation and refinancing of the five toll bridges now controlled by the Triborough Bridge Authority made available a total of \$27,500,000 in cash for improved approaches and incidental improvements through the city, out of which we are paying for the Gowanus Improvement.



The Triborough's contribution is being rapidly completed. The first section of the Gowanus Elevated Parkway from Prospect Avenue to Owl's Head and various surface improvements open today. The rest of the work, delayed because of defense and priority difficulties, will be finished by the first of the year. The opening of the tunnel is a long way off, and, in the meantime, the Gowanus Improvement will be made accessible by the widening of Hicks Street to Atlantic Avenue already under way under the direction of the Borough President of Brooklyn. Plans are also being made for an elevated highway connecting the Hicks Street improvement with the existing older bridges and with the Brooklyn-Queens Connecting Highway.

The Gowanus Improvement consists of ten lanes of surface highway on Hamilton and Third Avenues from Hicks Street to 39th Street with an elevated parkway overhead. From 39th Street to 63rd Street, the old Third Avenue "El" has been remodeled with a new deck for four parkway lanes. At 63rd Street a new viaduct swings around the State Arsenal and the yards of the Long Island Railroad to a connection with the Belt Parkway system at Owl's Head Park.

At 39th Street a large part of the surface traffic will turn toward the South Brooklyn waterfront where it can flow into First and Second Avenues. The widening of 39th Street with ramps to the elevated structure has been planned and a request has been made for federal access road money so that the Gowanus Improvement will have proper connections with the great ship, rail and truck terminals, ocean-going freighter docks, Army and Navy bases, factories and warehouses in the vicinity engaged in defense and transportation.

The Gowanus Improvement required the assistance of the Board of Transportation. Arrangements were made through Chairman Delaney to insure continued operation of trolley cars during construction and the final substitution of buses for trolleys. The widening of Third Avenue and 39th Street necessitated rearrangement of the transportation facilities, including moving an existing building, construction of a new garage, and an exchange of lands between the Park Department and the Board of Transportation, all of which would have been impossible without cooperation.

This report was prepared by a committee consisting of Sidney Shapiro, Deputy Chief Engineer of the Long Island State Park Commission; Clinton F. Loyd, Chief of Architectural Design of Madigan-Hyland, Consulting Engineers; Henry A. Strecker, Jr., Contact Engineer of the New York State Department of Public Works; and Becky LaMonte, Assistant to the Chairman of the Triborough Bridge Authority.

#### TRIBOROUGH BRIDGE AUTHORITY

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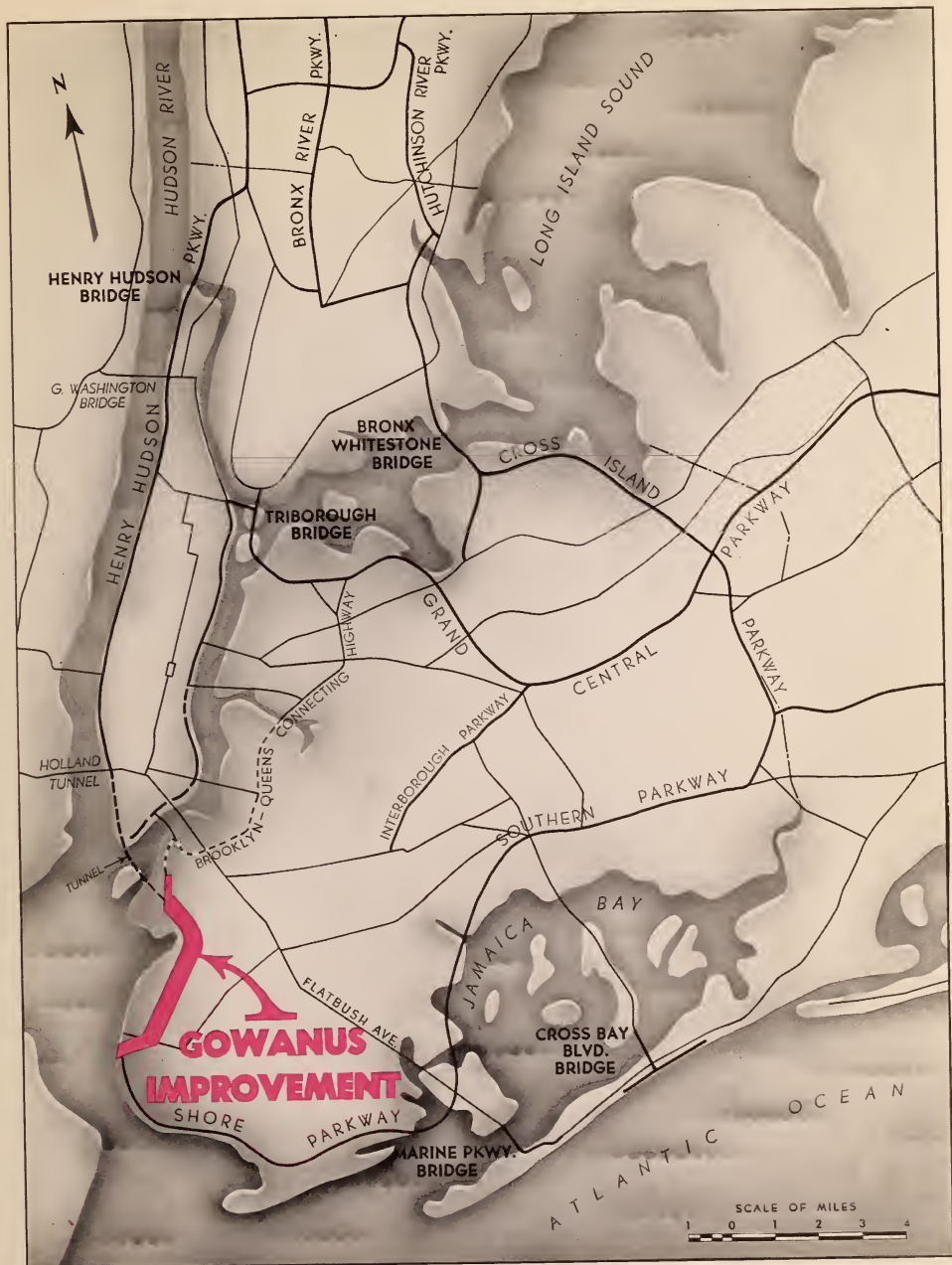
GEORGE V. McLAUGHLIN, *Vice-Chairman*

RODERICK STEPHENS, *Vice-Chairman*



VIEW OF THE GOWANUS IMPROVEMENT  
looking from Owl's Head toward Manhattan.







STEEL CONSTRUCTION . . . on the main viaduct of the elevated parkway





CONSTRUCTION ALONG THIRD AVENUE . . . Above, the new elevated parkway, and below, the conversion of the old Third Avenue "El" into a four lane vehicular roadway.



BELT  
PKWY - OWL'S  
HEAD  
PARK



SHIP  
LOADING



GAS MASKS



NAVIGATION  
INSTRUMENTS



SHIP BUILDING



STATE  
ARSENAL



U. S. ARMY SUPPLY BASE



MILITARY SILK



SHELLS



AIRPLANE PARTS



U. S. NAVAL SUPPLY  
BASE



MARINE SUPPLIES

**GOWANUS**

MEDICAL  
SUPPLIES

**IMPROVEMENT**

AVENUE

4th

67th STREET

39th STREET

BROOKLYN

WATERFRONT

PROSPECT AVENUE



ERNORS  
AND



BATTERY  
PARK

MANHATTAN

TUNNEL (UNDER  
CONSTRUCTION)



HAMILTON AVENUE

HICKS STREET

BROOKLYN

ATLANTIC AVENUE

COURT STREET

QUEENS

UNITED STATES  
NAVY YARD

CONNECTING

To QUEENS →  
HIGHWAY

NEW LOW LEVEL  
DRAWBRIDGE

GOWANUS CANAL



# GOWANUS IMPROVEMENT

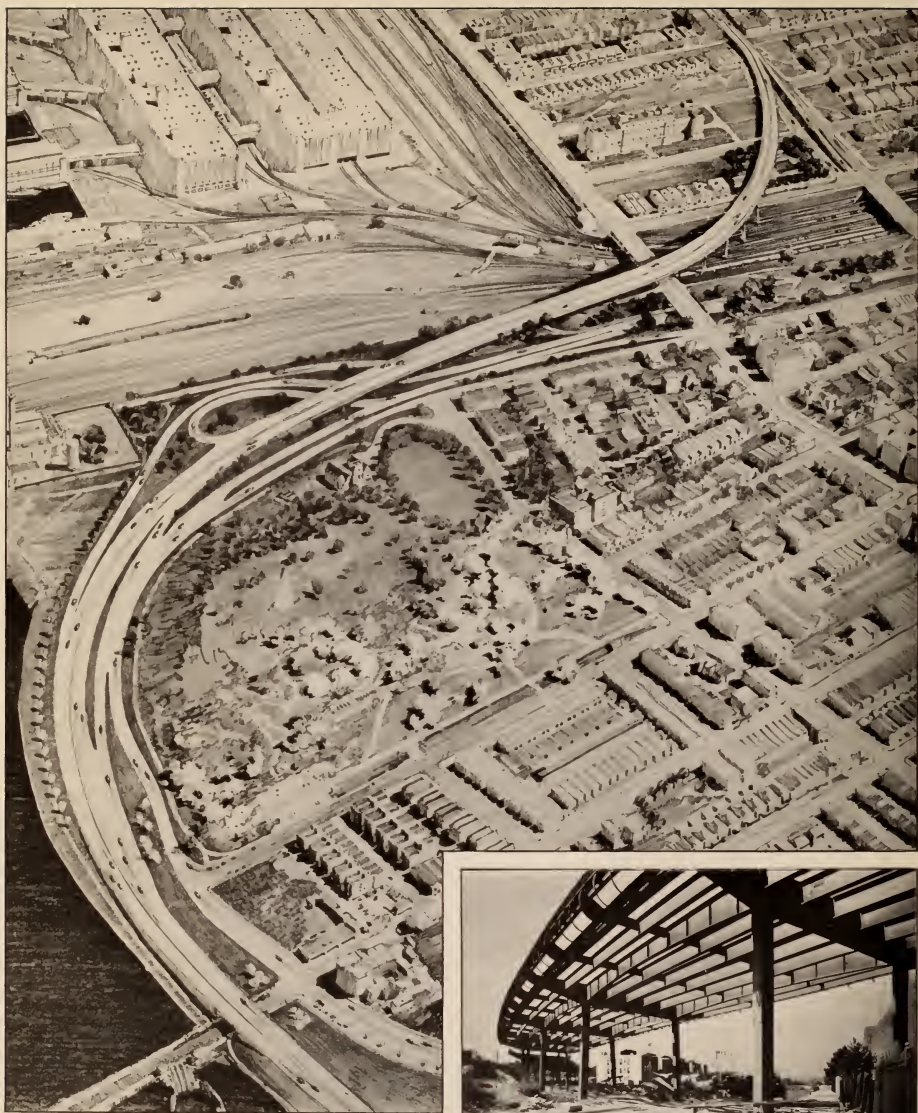
SHOWING

## DEFENSE INDUSTRIES

IN ITS VICINITY

CK





OWL'S HEAD INTERSECTION . . . connection with the Belt Parkway system. The insert shows typical steel structure in this section.





### PROSPECT AVENUE INTERSECTION . . .

Entrance and exit ramps carry traffic to and from the elevated parkway.  
The photographs above show stone work on these ramps.







THE GOWANUS CANAL . . . is crossed by a low level draw-bridge for street traffic as well as by the parkway. Above, the former drawbridge, below, the new bridge nearing completion, and to the left, steel structure for the parkway.





STEEL STRUCTURE . . . 90 feet high carries the elevated parkway above the drawbridge and across the Gowanus Canal. The picture below shows work in progress on both these bridges.







FAIRCHILD AERIAL SURVEYS, INC. N.Y.C.

HARBOR ACTIVITY . . . along the Brooklyn waterfront near the new improvement.



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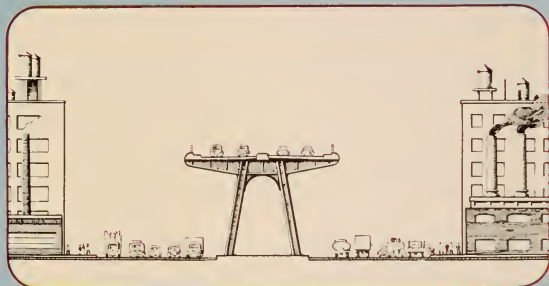
CLINTON F. LOYD

*Chief Architectural Design*

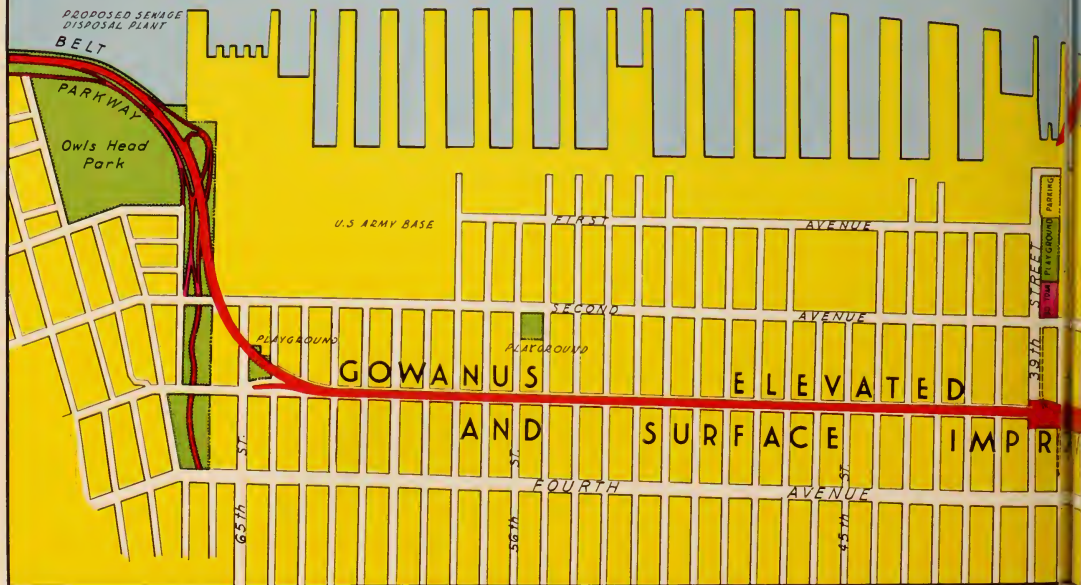
HAROLD W. HUDSON

*Engineer of Construction*

WADDELL & HARDESTY



This diagram shows how Third Avenue has been widened to take care of 10 lanes of mixed traffic, 5 in each direction. The elevated section carries 4 lanes of traffic, restricted to passenger cars.



### 39TH STREET IMPROVEMENT

Federal access road funds have been requested for widening and improving 39th Street from Third Avenue to the 39th Street ferry terminal to facilitate access to First and Second avenues along which are located many plants engaged in defense work. Parking space will also be provided, together with a small park and playground.

GOVERNORS  
ISLAND

Buttermilk Channel

BATTERY TUNNEL  
(Under Construction)









